

OPEN LETTER

Dear Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Minister Keith Ashfield, and Minister Peter Kent:

On May 17, 2012, we learned that **Canada's Experimental Lakes Area (ELA)**, a world-renowned freshwater and fisheries research facility, will be terminated in March 2013.

We are deeply concerned with this decision, as there is **no other comparable facility in the world**. The ELA, located in northwestern Ontario, consists of 58 small lakes and their watersheds set aside for research, a permanent field station, and a dedicated research team. Since 1968, this facility has been a natural outdoor laboratory to study how fish populations and lake ecosystems respond to human and natural disturbances. ELA features unique, whole-ecosystem experiments and continuous, long-term ecological monitoring.

The ELA is vital to Canadians: its value lies in the irreplaceable capacity for Canadian scientists and their partners to conduct **experiments on entire lake ecosystems**, not just in test tubes in laboratories. Such large-scale, “real-life” studies are pivotal for answers to questions about water quality and fisheries. Smaller-scale experiments simply cannot provide reliable information for management decisions. In addition, because ELA has been operating for over four decades, it houses **the longest continuous monitoring record** for freshwater lakes in Canada. These data allow scientists to assess how global changes, such as climate warming, are affecting our lakes.

Research at ELA provides key information, unattainable elsewhere, for **objective, evidence-based decision-making**. ELA studies provide the knowledge and solutions to some of the most important environmental issues: algal blooms, mercury pollution, greenhouse gases, acid rain, flame retardants, nanoparticles, and endocrine-disrupting chemicals. The pioneering, transformational research conducted at the ELA has been instrumental in the development of **environmental policy and legislation** both nationally and internationally, and has informed **best management practices** for commercial aquaculture and hydroelectric industries, among many others.

You have repeatedly noted that government should be “judged on its record”. ELA has a **stellar record and an international reputation**. ELA and its dedicated team of scientists have placed Canada at the very forefront of freshwater science world-wide. ELA scientists have been recipients of numerous prestigious national and international awards, and the scientific output from ELA has been impressive – more than 1000 scientific articles, graduate theses, and books. ELA is also a remarkable and unparalleled **training ground for the next generation** of Canadian scientists.

The closure of ELA is only one example of the **many recent cuts to federal environmental programming**. These cuts seriously undermine our capacity to protect and manage Canada's freshwater and marine resources. Further, we are deeply disturbed about the proposed changes to the Fisheries Act, the Navigable Waters Protection Act, the Species at Risk Act, the Coasting Trade Act, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, and other related issues that are rolled into **Omnibus Budget Bill C-38**.

Water is essential for life. Clean water is crucial for the health of all Canadians, and lakes are part of our social, spiritual, and economic well-being. **Canadians need and deserve an internationally renowned freshwater and fisheries research facility**. We strongly urge the Government of Canada to reconsider the decision to close Canada's ELA, and recognize the importance of the ELA to the Government's mandate to study, preserve, and protect aquatic ecosystems.

Sincerely,

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